

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PRETOR 01643 200921Z

11

ACTION AF-18

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FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9691

INFO AMEMBASSY GABORONE

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY MASERU

AMEMBASSY MBABANE

AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

AMCONSUL DURBAN

AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, SF

SUBJ: ON THE EVE OF THE ELECTION

REF: PRETORIA 1154 AND CAPE TOWN 0087

1. NEXT WEDNESDAY, APRIL 24, ABOUT ONE AND A HALF MILLION SOUTH AFRICAN WHITES, SEVEN PERCENT OF THE COUNTRY'S TOTAL POPULATION, WILL GO TO POLLS TO SELECT THEIR NEW PARLIAMENT. AS WE HAVE REPORTED PREVIOUSLY, THERE IS NO DOUBT WHATEVER THAT NATIONAL PARTY WILL BE RETURNED TO POWER.

2. BECAUSE THERE ARE NO SOPHISTICATED POLLING ORGANIZATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA, PREDICTIONS ON OUTCOME OF ELECTION ARE ESPECIALLY HAZARDOUS. BUT IT GENERALLY BELIEVED THAT NATIONALISTS WILL BE VERY LEAST RETAIN THE 118 SEATS THEY NOW HAVE, AND PROBABLY ADD A FEW SEATS TO THAT TOTAL. IT
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PAGE 02 PRETOR 01643 200921Z

ALSO LIKELY THAT PROGRESSIVE PARTY'S LONE MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT,

HELEN SUZMAN, WILL BE JOINED IN THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY BY ONE OR TWO OTHER PROGS. EVEN IF THEY FAIL TO WIN NEW SEATS, PROGS SHOULD INCREASE THEIR PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL VOTE. THE EXTREME RIGHT-WING HERSTIGTE NASIONALE PARTY PROBABLY WILL ONCE AGAIN FAIL TO WIN ANY SEATS, AND INDICATIONS ARE THAT ITS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL VOTE WILL DECREASE.

3. BECAUSE NUMBER OF SEATS IN PARLIAMENT HAS BEEN INCREASED FROM 166 TO 171, DESPITE GAINS NATIONALISTS AND PROGS MAY MAKE, IT POSSIBLE UNITED PARTY (UP) WILL LOSE JUST A FEW SEATS, PERHAPS NONE. HOWEVER, IF PRE-ELECTION INDICATIONS ARE BORNE OUT, THE UP WILL DO WELL TO MAINTAIN SAME PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL VOTES IT RECEIVED IN 1970 (37.2 PERCENT). DURING ELECTION CAMPAIGN, UP HAS FOUND ITSELF ON DEFENSIVE, ITS CONSERVATIVES AND LIBERALS ALIKE COUNTERING ALLEGATIONS BY NATIONALISTS AND PROGS THAT UP WOULD FALL APART AFTER ELECTION. IT WOULD APPEAR, THEN, THAT LOSER IN THIS ELECTION WILL BE UP'S PRESENT LEADERSHIP, FOR EVEN IF THE PARTY DOES MANAGE TO HOLD TOGETHER, ITS EFFECTIVENESS AS AN OPPOSITION CAN ONLY BE DIMINISHED. QUESTION REMAINS WHETHER THERE WILL BE A FUNDAMENTAL REALIGNMENT OF SOUTH AFRICAN POLITICS ALONG MORE DISTINCT CONSERVATIVE-LIBERAL LINES, AND IF SO HOW WILL IT TAKE PLACE, I.E., WHO WOULD LEAVE UP, ITS "OLD GUARD" OR ITS REFORMISTS.

4. FROM OUTSET, ELECTION CAMPAIGN HAS NOT GENERATED MUCH INTEREST. GREATER ISSUE OF BLACK-WHITE RELATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA HAS TO A LARGE EXTENT BEEN LOST IN SHUFFLE, AS LESSER ISSUES HAVE RECEIVED MORE EMPHASIS FROM THE CANDIDATES. EVEN BREAD-AND-BUTTER ISSUE OF INFLATION HAS NOT HAD MUCH IMPACT. IN A SENSE, LEITMOTIV OF THIS ELECTION CAMPAIGN IS SAME SUBJECT THAT HAS DOMINATED WHITE POLITICS FOR MANY YEARS, VIZ. TRIBAL ANTIPATHY BETWEEN AFRIKANER AND ENGLISH-SPEAKER. AS THEY DID IN 1966 AND AGAIN IN 1970, NATIONALISTS HAVE APPEALED TO ENGLISH-SPEAKING WHITES TO FORGET THEIR HISTORICAL DIFFERENCES WITH AFRIKANERS AND GIVE THEIR SUPPORT TO NATIONAL PARTY. NATIONALISTS FAILED IN THIS ENDEAVOR IN THE TWO PREVIOUS ELECTIONS AND MORE THAN LIKELY WILL FAIL AGAIN.

5. STILL, EVEN THOUGH RACE RELATIONS AND ISSUE OF BLACK DOMINANCE OF SOUTH AFRICA HAVE NOT RECEIVED AS MUCH ATTENTION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 PRETOR 01643 200921Z

FROM CANDIDATES AS MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED, RACE RELATIONS WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE A MAJOR FACTOR INFLUENCING HOW WHITES WILL VOTE. THE 55 TO 60 PERCENT VOTE WHICH NATIONAL PARTY WILL RECEIVE WILL BE CAST MAINLY BY AFRIKANERS. THEY WILL DO SO PARTLY OUT OF TRIBAL LOYALTY BUT ALSO BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE NP IS PARTY MOST ABLE TO PRESERVE WHITE SUPREMACY AND MAINTAIN AFFLUENCE ENJOYED BY MOST WHITE SOUTH AFRICANS. UP'S FAILURE TO IMPROVE ITS POSITION AND TO MAKE INROADS INTO

AFRIKANER COHESIVENESS RESULTS LARGELY FROM FACT THAT AS YET
IT HAS FAILED TO PROVIDE AN ACCEPTABLE ALTERNATIVE TO RACIAL
POLICIES OF NATIONAL PARTY--AN ALTERNATIVE SUFFICIENTLY
ATTRACTIVE TO WEAKEN AFRIKANER TRIBALISM.
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